

(Received via e-mail)

From: Friends of Eldorado
To: <smcconnell@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: 3/31/2009 1:31 PM
Subject: Rubicon clean-up and abatement order comment

Dear Susan,

I am writing this letter in response to the draft cleanup and abatement order issued by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control board in January of 2009.

There are three points that I will address in this letter, the original complaint that was filed and the reasons behind it, the draft itself, and the importance of the Rubicon trail.

I was brought to my attention that this clean-up and abatement order was issued because of complaints by a small group of people worried about supposed "water quality" issues. I ask that the Water Board look more closely at the motivations of these individuals. This has nothing to do with water quality issues; this complaint was filed because of user conflict on the Rubicon trail. The complaint was filed by cross country skiers and other anti-OHV recreationists who want nothing more than the trail to be closed to motorized recreation because they believe OHV use should not be permitted in the forest.

If this group of individuals is so concerned about water quality issues, then why are they not complaining about logging from Sierra Pacific industries in the same area? Tracked logging equipment over the forest floor does much more damage than a wheeled motorized vehicle. Why have they not issued a complaint against Highway 50 which dumps fluids from cars into the adjacent river? Why have they not issued a complaint about the Pacific Crest trail which runs 2,650 miles and travels through Wilderness areas? During the Spring run off, the Pacific Crest Trail turns into a gully, washing sediment into many different streams, rivers and lakes. Why have they not filed a complaint about farming in the Central Valley that also dumps sediment and contaminants into our water system?

The answer is simple. This complaint was not filed with the goal of improving water quality; it was filed to restrict OHV access to an historic and important 4x4 trail that this small group of people want closed because of their own agenda. A quick search on the internet will show that this is just one tactic used by this group of individuals in their efforts to have the area set aside for themselves.

If anything, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board should be offended that this group of anti-OHV recreationists are using the Board as a pawn to push their true motivations. In terms of what is harming our water quality, the Rubicon Trail is a minuscule issue in comparison to other more prevalent sources of sediment.

I have spent much time going over the Draft Clean-up and Abatement order. While I do not have a background in Environmental Science, I am a high school teacher and have a Master's Degree in Communication. When an author cites a source or a study, how can they cite themselves? This is done several times within the document by the author.

Furthermore, I checked the documents that the author cited as sources. It seems that the author assumed no one would check his sources, many of the citations had little to nothing to do with what the author said they did.

Just ONE example of this in the document is the author implying that erosion from an OHV trail can be described using an equation ($E_t = E_b + E_s$) that a person by the name of Megahan had developed. In looking at the work of Megahan that was cited, I can find nothing which shows that this equation was formulated for OHV trails. The equation was for a completely different type of route. A huge portion of the Rubicon trail is over solid granite rock. Even if this equation was calculated for the type of trail the Rubicon is, how can you correctly estimate sediment with varying types of surfaces with one equation?

The document also compares the Rubicon Trail with other roads such as logging roads. How can this be done?

There is also no information in the study about the water quality of Loon Lake or other nearby bodies of water. If the damage is so severe, why is Loon Lake so clear?

The Rubicon trail is an historic OHV trail, and important part of the OHV culture that was spawned from the beginnings of the trail. It is the "crown jewel" for 4x4 users, many traveling from all around the globe to travel the trail. The Jeepers Jamboree was created in the 1950's by the residents of Georgetown to stimulate their local economy and make sure that their town survives. Many other towns such as Placerville and Pollock Pines also benefit from the popularity of the Rubicon Trail. By limiting travel on the trail, the local economy will be greatly affected. To a degree which outweighs any possible small "water quality" effects.

Thousand of hours of volunteer labor have been spent on the Rubicon by OHV users in order to mitigate and possible damage. I myself have been on work parties in the area keeping the forest clean and mitigating damage.

The 4x4 club, the Pirate of the Rubicon have even gone to the extreme of picking up human waste though out the length of the trail because of supposed "water quality" issues. While many people see OHV use as just a "hobby", in this area of Northern California, it is more of a culture and a major part of people's lives. That is why clubs such as the Pirates of the Rubicon have gone to such extreme lengths to keep this trail open. We care that much about our trail.

I spend a considerable amount of time on the Rubicon trail with my family. There is nothing more my two little boys love than four

wheeling with dad, and camping on the Rubicon. It is a major part of our lives, and the lives of many others in Northern CA. It is not just a hobby, it is akin to a "culture" or a religious experience for many.

According to a recent forest service study on OHV use, California alone has 4,351,300 OHV users over the age of 16. This report can be seen by following this link:

http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/OHV_final_report.pdf

The study also shows how OHV use is steadily increasing. Yet the opportunities for OHV use is declining. Eldorado national Forest has enacted wet weather closures on all of its dirt routes. Three months out of the year, all dirt forest routes are closed to wheeled motor vehicle traffic. There are now only a few small areas in Eldorado that allow OHV use during the winter.

By closing areas and forcing this massive number of OHV users into small sections, there will be even more damage to the environment. If the number of vehicles is limited on the Rubicon, it will only lead to more vehicles in other places.

Kurt Schneider
The Friends of Eldorado National Forest.